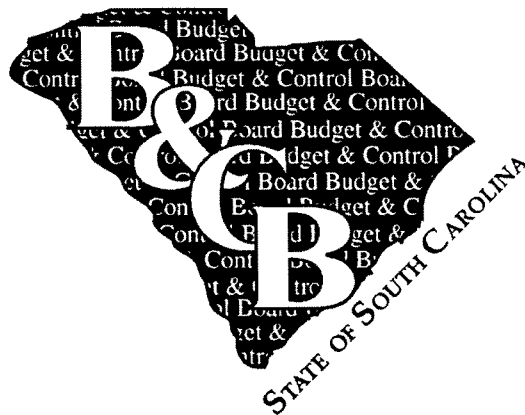


May 23, 2003

State Government News Summary



**Prepared by the Budget and Control Board
Office of the Executive Director**



Posted on Fri, May. 23, 2003

Cigarette tax plan collapses

Senate budget slashes education and health care spending

By VALERIE BAUERLEIN
Staff Writer

Senators got disgusted with one another, threw up their hands and went home Thursday night, closing the books on a state budget that would lower education spending to historic levels, eliminate the SilverCard drug program and cut health care for 43,000 children.

Senators were close to agreement on a cigarette tax increase to raise \$170 million for Medicaid, the health care program for the poor and elderly. But negotiations broke down abruptly and angrily, and senators left 10 minutes later.

The fight was over Gov. Mark Sanford's requirement that raising the cigarette tax be accompanied by lowering the income tax. Sanford had lobbied hard for his plan through the week, visiting the Senate antechamber a half-dozen times and visiting senators in their Gressette Building offices.

But he left Thursday afternoon on a plane to Bermuda to attend the conclusion of a Charleston-to-Bermuda yacht race.

Democrats said they could not accept lowering the income tax by the amount Sanford wanted, and were unsure whether he would accept a lesser amount.

Democrats like the idea of lowering the income tax, but worry about taking too much tax money out of programs for schools and other government needs, said Sen. Tommy Moore, D-Aiken.

"If I were going to give some constructive criticism, it's that I wish the governor was here to help us work this out," Moore said.

Overall, he said the breakdown was disheartening. "We talk about Medicaid and all the recipients and all the providers. It's not dead yet, but it's in critical condition."

Senate Majority Leader Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, said Moore's argument was hogwash.

The governor notwithstanding, Democrats had been resisting compromise for weeks and continued to, at the expense of the poor and the sick, he said.

"We're at an absolute impasse," Leatherman said. "There's no point in staying here if we're not going to be able to meet the needs of Medicaid."

The bottom line? The Senate had agreed Wednesday to spend three days trying to reach a compromise on raising taxes. They gave up after one. Leatherman said perhaps the Senate can reconsider raising the cigarette tax next week, but it would have to be in legislation other than the budget.

This leaves health care in an unprecedented bind, said Robert Kerr, the director of Health and Human

Services, the Medicaid agency. Without the \$170 million a cigarette tax would have raised for Medicaid, the state will miss out on \$400 million in federal matching funds - money used to pay doctors, nursing homes and other providers.

But most important, Kerr said, the agency will have to cut entire programs. That means not paying for: SilverCard, which helps 66,000 seniors buy prescription drugs; CHIPS, which provides health insurance for 43,000 children; 6,000 nursing home beds; and prescription drug benefits for many Medicaid recipients.

"We just hate to see people lose health care who need it most," Kerr said. "They're the ones who can least afford it, and they have no one to speak for them." The legislative day was filled with impassioned speeches.

Leatherman said the "blood of the poor and the weak will be on the hands" of those who did not fund Medicaid. Sen. Verne Smith, R-Greenville, implored people to "care about the raggedy children and those frail old people in the nursing homes."

But the day was also filled with frustration and raised voices - characteristic of the three weeks of budget deliberations. Smith chastised another senator for talking during his speech. Each side accused the other of being obstructionist.

Sen. John Kuhn, R-Charleston, skipped his 5-year-old daughter's graduation ceremony to work on the budget, but said he did not appreciate jokes from senators urging him to leave. His colleagues had teased him because Kuhn often takes the floor to speak.

"It's not fun to make a telephone call to tell her why I can't be there," Kuhn said. "It's really not fun to have you all pour salt in those wounds."

The one area of consensus was grumbling about Sanford. Republicans muttered their disapproval, but Democrats voiced theirs more loudly.

"We're here working; people are missing their daughter's graduation," Ford said, "And the governor put on a pair of short pants and a white T-shirt and took off to Bermuda? Nah. You can't do that."

Sanford spokesman Will Folks said, "I think it's more than a little disingenuous for someone to blame the governor for their own inability to compromise."

Next week brings more budget wrangling. The House and Senate will appoint a joint committee to work out differences in their respective budgets. That conference committee could start work as early as Wednesday, Leatherman said. Ideally, he said, the budget should be done by June 5, the last day of the legislative session.

However, legislators are warning a two-week extended session is a strong possibility as it normally takes more than a week for the House and Senate to work out its budget differences.



Posted on Fri, May. 23, 2003

S.C. residents fear cuts' impact

Those who would be hurt by Senate budget speak out against SilverCard, nursing home cuts

By JAYMI FREIDEN
Staff Writer

If health care funding through Medicaid is threatened by state budget cuts, thousands of South Carolinians will find themselves struggling to pay for prescription drugs and nursing home care.

Here are some of their stories:

SILVERCARD

Mattie Bookhart is spending her retirement volunteering at Forest Heights Elementary School.

She helps the children with reading, pulls lunch duty and takes sick children to the school nurse.

Bookhart, 70, wouldn't be able to do any of that if it weren't for the four medications she takes to treat her high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma. But her prescriptions are expensive, running between \$500 and \$600 per month. The state's SilverCard prescription drug program for seniors pays for about 40 percent of her drugs. Without it, Bookhart worries she'll have to choose among prescriptions.

"If they cut SilverCard, I don't know if I could afford the medicine because it's so expensive," said Bookhart, who retired from a career as a food service manager in 1998.

Once, when Bookhart couldn't get her asthma medicine, she ended up in the hospital for a month because doctors couldn't regulate her breathing. She fears problems like this could happen to her again if SilverCard is eliminated.

"I've been reading the paper and listening to the news and praying every day they don't cut it," she said.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE

Racquel Owens is a single parent of a 4-year-old with asthma.

If it weren't for the state's Children's Health Insurance Program, it would be impossible for Owens to pay \$400 every month for Taylor's medications.

"For a single parent with a house payment and a car payment and bills, that's a lot," said Owens, a community parent with Family Connection of South Carolina, a nonprofit organization for families of children with development disabilities, delays and chronic illnesses.

Taylor was diagnosed with asthma at 15 months. He's on five medications to control it and is able to lead a normal life. He starts kindergarten in the fall.

But if CHIP, an optional program under the state's Medicaid program, is cut, Owens speculates she'd have to get a second job to help pay for Taylor's prescriptions.

"I'd have less time to spend at home," she said. "Something would go lacking, and it would be very, very hard because I need to be able to give him support he needs."

Owens knows of many other parents of children with illnesses that are even more costly to treat than Taylor's, and she worries for them. Cutting the CHIP program would be devastating, and she hopes state legislators understand that.

"It would be one of the worst things they could do," she said. "A lot of people really depend on it."

NURSING HOME CARE

Six thousand nursing home patients getting the intermediate level of care would no longer be Medicaid-eligible, forcing nursing homes to discharge them if they don't find another way to pay for their care, said Randy Lee, president of the S.C. Health Care Association.

"I have never been through anything like this," he said.

Intermediate level patients can't live on their own, but are able to function at a slightly higher level than those getting skilled care, Lee said. Many are in the early stages of dementia. Skilled care patients, who need the most assistance, are not in danger of being discharged.

The majority of intermediate care patients no longer have homes of their own, and if they do have families, those family members may not have the resources to care for them at home.

"We would probably have to discharge them to the hospitals," Lee said.

If these 6,000 people lose their eligibility, Lee said, the equivalent of 60 or 70 nursing homes would have to close because the facilities couldn't operate after losing so much money from Medicaid. Close to two-thirds of the state's nursing home beds are paid for through Medicaid, with an average cost of \$107.50 per day.

"I do not believe it's a political ploy," Lee said. "I believe it's a real possibility."



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Senate rejects governor's tax-swap plan

Posted Thursday, May 22, 2003 - 9:15 pm

By James T. Hammond and Tim Smith
CAPITAL BUREAU
COLUMBIA — The Senate Thursday killed a tax swap to raise cigarette taxes 53-cents per pack while reducing the top income-tax rate to 5 percent from 7 percent.

[e-mail this story](#)

The tax swap was backed by Gov. Mark Sanford, who was flying to Bermuda for a family vacation when the Senate voted Thursday afternoon. The Republican governor had lobbied all 46 senators in the last two days to pass his bill, but it was killed by a 28-18 vote, similar to a vote taken last week.

The governor's absence during the debate on his centerpiece legislation left some senators shaking their heads.

"The governor left his responsibilities and went to Bermuda," said Sen. Robert Ford, D-Charleston.

A spokesman for Sanford said there was nothing improper about Sanford's absence.

"The governor, over the last 36 hours, has had personal conversations with nearly every senator," Sanford spokesman Will Folks said. "The legislative process is all about negotiation. There comes a point in that process, however, when you simply have to walk away. The governor is not going to negotiate where his plan is undermined."

The Senate adjourned Thursday evening in frustration, with Democrats and Republicans blaming each other for the lack of a revenue plan to address education and healthcare needs and offering only grim hope of a compromise before the Legislature ends its regular session on June 5.

"Yes, there is a chance," said Sen. Tom Moore, a Clearwater Democrat. "Will it happen? The odds are strongly against it."

Senate Majority Hugh Leatherman said he would work to find a compromise to fund the \$171 million Medicaid shortfall in the days remaining.

Also defeated Thursday was a proposal by Sen. David Thomas of Greenville to end property taxes through a two-cent increase in sales tax. The Senate tabled the plan 21-18 after some senators raised questions about its impact.

The Senate passed a budget Wednesday that fell \$20 million short of the spending plan passed by the House after weeks of disagreement over how to fund shortfalls in healthcare and education. Senate leaders hoped to craft a revenue plan in separate legislation Thursday but acrimony spread. Leatherman accused Democrats of

obstructing any plan involving the governor's proposal, a charge Moore denied.

"When it's all said and done, if you've got the majority, how can you blame the minority for thwarting the will of everything?" he asked.

The cigarette tax, estimated to raise \$171 million a year, would have funded the following, according to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Hugh Leatherman:

- . 6,000 nursing home recipients;
- . 12,000 people in community long-term care;
- . 66,000 seniors in the SilverCard prescription drug program;
- . 250,000 others who receive pharmaceutical benefits;
- . 49,700 aged, blind and disabled people who receive Medicaid services;
- . and 43,000 children in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIPS).

Leatherman said that without the increased cigarette tax, those programs would be "gutted."

"If we leave here without funding Medicaid, the blood of the poor and weak will be on the hands of those who stopped it," he said.

With the federal matching funds from the state-federal Medicaid health insurance program, the \$171 million would generate a total of \$500 million in health care services.

Leatherman added that if the Senate fails to pass the cigarette tax, "it will be criminal and they ought to lock us up."

Sen. Larry Martin, R-Pickens, said senators would not be able to hide behind technical votes for the bill if they fail to pass it.

"If the citizens are not getting the services on July 1, it's not going to matter how you voted on this or that amendment. You didn't deliver," Martin said.

Sen. Jake Knotts, R-Lexington, an opponent of the cigarette tax, pointed out that the Medicaid fraud unit had uncovered \$6 million in Medicaid waste, fraud and abuse, and said that illustrated why the Senate should not increase funding for the federal program.

But Sen. Greg Gregory, R-Lancaster, said the numbers illustrate exactly the opposite point.

Gregory noted that a Legislative Audit Council study found just \$20 million in duplications, fraud and abuse in the state's \$3 billion Medicaid program.

"That's a very small number, less than one percent," Gregory said, suggesting that any business would be happy to have such a small percentage of its finances in the questionable category.

Lawmakers must agree on a state budget by June 5 or arrange for an extra legislative session.





HILTON HEAD ISLAND - BLUFFTON S.C.


Southern Beaufort County's News & Information Source



Senator proposes suspending PACT testing

BY KAREN ADDY, *Packet Columbia Bureau*
Published Friday, May 23rd, 2003

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 Contact South Carolina's state legislators

COLUMBIA -- Pressures created by the state's high-stakes accountability tests cause fear among teachers, according to a senator who wants to suspend some testing next year.

Sen. Linda Short, D-Chester, believes the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test, which will cost the state \$27.4 million next year, is a waste of money.

With mandates to improve test scores hanging over their heads, teachers fear their jobs will be at risk if students perform poorly, Short said. She is sponsoring a measure to suspend social studies, science and end-of-term tests for a year to save the state up to \$6 million.

Sen. John Kuhn, R-Charleston, supported the measure. He said teachers frequently call him to complain about the PACT. Eliminating it would free up three weeks of classroom time, he said.

On Wednesday, Short and some other senators sponsored a second measure to eliminate the Education Oversight Committee, for a savings of \$1.4 million. It passed by a wide majority.

The 18-member, seven-employee committee sets standards for improving K-12 education, reviews tests and conducts teacher surveys. Business representatives, legislators and educators sit on the committee.

The state has gone too far in imposing a rigid business mentality onto education, Short said.

"Businesses get in materials," Short said. "When they get defective raw materials, they send them back. Well, schools can't send children back, and schools can't be run just like a business."

Dr. Joe Anne Anderson, executive director of the committee, acknowledged that districts with large Hispanic populations, such as Beaufort County, face an additional problem because students who lack fluency in English must take the test.

John Williams, spokesman for Beaufort County schools, said test scores are expected to drop this year because 1,100 of the district's 18,000 students don't speak English.

Contact Karen Addy at (803) 256-3800 and at kaddy@heraldonline.com.

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Sanford pitches four-lane evacuation plan

Governor pushes restructuring goals

BY E.J. SCHULTZ, *The Island Packet*

Other stories by E.J. Schultz

Published Thursday, May 22nd, 2003

Gov. Mark Sanford, who was on Hilton Head Island on Wednesday, is pushing a hurricane evacuation plan that would use all four lanes of U.S. 278 to move residents and visitors away from Hilton Head to Interstate 95, starting at S.C. 46.

The governor said he recently discussed the plan with state Department of Transportation officials, whom he said were initially "reticent" about the proposal but have agreed to research it.

The current evacuation plan calls for three of the four U.S. 278 lanes to be routed west from near Spanish Wells Road to S.C. 46. From that point forward, the road reverts back to normal traffic flow, two lanes west and two lanes east.

Steve Fields, a deputy director of the Beaufort County Emergency Management Department, said he had not heard about the governor's proposal and declined to offer an opinion on it, only saying the plan probably could be implemented before this hurricane season.

"We've always got to be flexible," he said.

Sanford detailed the plan to reporters after giving a speech on Hilton Head before about 350 local businesspeople.

Equipped with charts, numbers and graphs, the governor used most of the 40-minute speech to push his sweeping budget and government restructuring proposals aimed at changing what he called a "dysfunctional system in Columbia."

The speech was co-sponsored by the Greater Beaufort-Hilton Head Economic Development Partnership, the Greater Beaufort Chamber of Commerce, the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce and a handful of local businesses.

Some of the proposals the governor discussed in the speech, including proposals for a cigarette tax increase and an income tax decrease, are being debated by state lawmakers this week as part of ongoing state budget negotiations.

Under Sanford's plan, the state would increase the cigarette tax from 7 cents a pack to 60 cents a pack, accompanied by a reduction of the state income tax rate from 7 percent to 5 percent over 15 years. "Over time, this results in being a substantial tax cut," he said of the plan.

The governor said his proposals would increase the state's per capita income, which he said was on average \$5,600 less than the national average.

"We're falling further behind the curve," Sanford said.

To highlight his point, he showed a map of the state showing as red all counties that were below the average national income level and in yellow counties that were above it.

Beaufort County was the only yellow county -- a fact that drew applause from the lunchtime crowd at the Marriott Beach and

Quick Links

[Contact Gov. Mark Sanford](#)
Jay Kari/*The Island Packet*

Gov. Mark Sanford makes a speech before about 350 local businesspeople Wednesday at the Hilton Head Marriott Beach and Golf Resort.

[+ Enlarge Image](#)

Golf Resort.

The governor credited the "entrepreneurial level" of area residents, but also said the county may be better off than others because "a bunch of wealthy Yankees moved (here) ... and brought money with them."

The governor also said the moves would encourage more companies to move to South Carolina.

Sanford also reiterated his support for charter schools and said local governments should have more control over state education funding.

He wants to break funding into six categories of block grants, instead of the 80 separate expenditure categories he said the system currently uses.

The current system, according to Sanford's figures, has resulted in a 117 percent increase in per-pupil spending during the past 30 years. Over the same period, he said, the number of students in the state has only increased by a half percent and SAT scores have risen by just 5 percent.

Improving the state's education system is "not just (about) money. It definitely involves reform," he said.

But education was not the only reform the governor discussed. Additionally, Sanford pushed his government restructuring plan that, among other things, would give more power to the governor's office and put the governor and lieutenant governor on the same election ticket.

"It makes no sense to have a half dozen cross-checks in the executive branch, which is what we have right now," he said of the plan, much of which would require voter approval.

Sanford also expressed support for the Jasper port proposal.

During his campaign, Sanford had questioned the plan by a private company to build a steamship port on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River because he said it could detract from the Port of Charleston.

But on Wednesday, the governor, answering a question from the crowd, said he now has a different take on the port proposal.

"What I've come to learn is that it would be a private (venture)," he said. "If that's the case I have no problem with it whatsoever."

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MyrtleBeachOnline.com

Posted on Fri, May. 23, 2003

HORRY COUNTY ROADS

New head of bank vows to aid in RIDE shortfall

By Zane Wilson
The Sun News

COLUMBIA - The new chairman of the state Infrastructure Bank said Thursday he'll do everything he can to help Horry County with its expected shortfall in bank payments for new roads.

The new chairman is Don Leonard, a longtime Myrtle Beach Realtor with Leonard Call and Associates. He was appointed by Gov. Mark Sanford to replace Champ Covington of Greenville, who was chairman of the bank since it was established in 1997.

The bank uses its leverage to issue bonds for major road projects, but the local area must pay part of the costs.

Horry County has had a 1.5 percent hospitality tax for 20 years that was expected to pay its \$750 million share of the \$1.1 billion Road Improvement Development Effort.

RIDE includes the Carolina Bays Parkway, or S.C. 31, and Veterans Highway, or S.C. 22, as well as S.C. 544 widening and several smaller projects.

Two weeks ago, the county said collections are running short by about \$2.5 million because of an economic slump.

Some local leaders are demanding the state forgive the underpayment because Horry County paid more than any other area for its projects.

Charleston County, for example, is paying \$75 million for the new billion-dollar Ravenel Bridge over Cooper River.

Leonard said he is aware of the complaints, and the bank has asked Horry County for figures on expected revenue for the next few years.

"I want to solve the problem over the long term," he said.

Bank administrator Debra Rountree said she thinks the shortfall may be temporary because of the economy. It's possible the new roads will soon boost tourism and the revenue that results from it, she said.

The bank is willing to work with the county but can't endanger its own credit rating, she said.

She did not know when Horry County would provide the figures.

The bank board spent more than three hours reviewing the details of refinancing plans and tentatively agreed to refinance about \$400 million of its bonds for a \$40 million savings.

Leonard said the savings won't help Horry County's problem but could put the bank in a better position to help.

Contact **ZANE WILSON** at zwilson@thesunnews.com or 520-0397.

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Posted on Fri, May. 23, 2003

FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Slightly less money allotted for I-73 study

By Zane Wilson
The Sun News

'At this point, it doesn't mean anything.'

Betty Mabry DOT director

COLUMBIA - Interstate 73 will get less planning money this year than expected, but that's not necessarily a bad thing, the Department of Transportation director said.

At its monthly meeting Thursday, the state DOT Commission learned that some road projects are getting more money than expected in the federal budget that was passed in February.

The DOT is still getting information on items that were included in the budget, said engineering chief Don Freeman.

The latest indications from Washington show that the proposed I-73, which will connect to Horry County, will get \$2.98 million for preliminary studies.

Last month, the board was told the road could have \$3 million if the DOT matched it with \$700,000, so the commission voted to do so. Freeman said the new information is that a match isn't required, so the \$700,000 should be put back where it belongs: in the maintenance fund.

DOT Director Betty Mabry said the change isn't a loss for the I-73 project because "at this point, it doesn't mean anything."

No one has been hired for the study, and there is no estimate for what it will cost, she said. The agency is working on requests for proposals from consultants to do the study, Mabry said.

Road maintenance funds are already cut short because they have been used as matching funds for federal construction money, so it's good to keep the \$700,000 in the maintenance budget, Mabry said.

Last week, agency officials met with their N.C. counterparts to discuss the layout of I-73 and the proposed I-74, which would also dip down from Brunswick County, N.C., into Horry County and possibly follow the Carolina Bays Parkway, or S.C. 31.

In addition, mass transit in Horry County, known as Lymo, will get 47.8 percent more in federal funds this year, for a total of \$1.2 million.

Glennith Johnson, DOT mass transit director, said the federal government put more money into mass transit this year.

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Posted on Fri, May. 23, 2003

Subcommittee OKs minibottle bill

House group set to vote next week

By Zane Wilson
The Sun News

COLUMBIA - The minibottle referendum bill passed a House subcommittee 4-1 on Thursday, with a member of the House leadership saying he intends to see it pass this year.

A subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee approved the bill setting a referendum in the 2004 elections, which would, if approved, remove minibottles from the state constitution and leave liquor sale methods for legislators to establish.

A separate bill on how that would be done is awaiting action on the House floor. Companion bills are waiting to be addressed on the Senate floor.

Rep. Jim Harrison, R-Columbia, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, supports the change. When Rep. Creighton Coleman, D-Winnsboro, wanted to delay action, so one of his constituents could come to speak on the issue, Harrison objected.

"Time's running short" for action this year, Harrison said. Coleman voted against the bill.

The full Judiciary Committee will take up the bill next week.

Contact ZANE WILSON at 520-0397 or zwilson@thesunnews.com.

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Posted on Fri, May. 23, 2003

S.C. House approves education reform bills

The S.C. House this week passed education bills that were pushed by Gov. Mark Sanford.

House members on Thursday approved the Streamlined Management and Accountable Resources for Teaching, or SMART, bill that would reform how education is funded.

Under the bill, all state funding for public schools would be consolidated into six categories -- quality teaching, instruction, technical assistance, operations and infrastructure, work force education and special needs.

The bill would give school districts flexibility to spend funds as they see fit.

On Wednesday, the House approved a bill that would add a conduct grade on a student's report card. Supporters say the bill would improve classroom discipline and expand character education in schools.

"These reforms will go a long way toward fixing two serious problems in our public schools -- a lack of flexibility in being able to spend state dollars where they're needed most and a lack of discipline in our classrooms," Sanford said.

Changes To Minority Affairs Panel Approved

A House bill that gives American Indian issues to the state Minority Affairs Commission has been approved by a Senate subcommittee.

The bill approved Wednesday is designed to help tribes gain state recognition.

"My regret is we couldn't do more," said state Sen. Bob Waldrep, R-Anderson, who is of Cherokee descent.

Waldrep said he wanted to give the agency money to handle its expanded duties. He hopes that will be possible in the future.

The bill also makes the agency responsible for Hispanic and Asian issues.

Some lawmakers have expressed concerns about the possibility of gambling and land claims, Waldrep said.

Federally recognized tribes are permitted to have gambling operations under certain conditions.

The Catawbas, the only federally recognized tribe in South Carolina, have bingo games in Rock Hill.

Will Goins, an American Indian and supporter of the bill, said backers need to educate legislators that state recognition is not a major step to federal recognition.

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Posted on Fri, May. 23, 2003

U.S. Education Department OKs S.C. school reform goals

State's challenge is to get every child doing 'B-level' work by 2013-2014

By BILL ROBINSON
Staff Writer

South Carolina's road map for complying with President Bush's school reform goals meets federal expectations, a U.S. Department of Education official said during a Thursday visit to Columbia.

The announcement was good news for the state's top educator, who has challenged legislators to restore \$260 million in spending cuts public schools will absorb next year.

"We definitely need more money if we're going to continue making the kind of (academic) progress the federal government expects," state Education Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum said.

"So far, we've seen no significant increase in federal funding (tied to school reform). And we can't expect the federal government to make up for what we're losing from the state," she said.

If Congress approves Bush's new education budget, Washington could send South Carolina \$676 million -- or \$155 million more than the state received before the president took office. Much of that money goes to specific programs targeting needy students, state officials note.

Tenenbaum said she will ask the state's congressional delegation to push for a law requiring every state to use the same rigorous test-grading system South Carolina and seven other states use.

"We can't have individual standards of performance if this (national reform law) is going to have any effect," she said.

Robert Pasternack, an assistant secretary with the federal Education Department, said the president believes states should set their own rating systems when drafting their plans to meet the standards in the law known as No Child Left Behind.

South Carolina joins 21 others now eligible to go forward with teaching and testing strategies crafted to ensure every child will be doing "B-level" work by the 2013-14 school year.

Between now and then, parents across South Carolina will get annual updates notifying them whether their local public schools are making "adequate yearly progress" toward that goal.

The "adequate yearly progress" report is a key element of No Child Left Behind. Bush's school reform says students in grades three through eight must be tested annually in math, English and science.

Some states are scrambling to create a grade-by-grade testing program, which South Carolina had in place in 1999.

The S.C. Education Department predicts 38 percent of all students will be doing B-level or better work by 2004-05, and every three years thereafter the state will make gains of 20 percent to reach the long-term

goal.

Pasternack said the president believes it is "important to report to the public paying the bills how their schools are performing."

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Thurmond weaker but alert, friends say

Posted Thursday, May 22, 2003 - 12:30 pm

By Dan Hoover
STAFF WRITER
dhoover@greenvillenews.com

Strom Thurmond's physical condition has weakened recently, but the 100-year-old former senator is alert and showing improvement, a family friend said Thursday.

[e-mail this story](#)

Bettis Rainsford, an Edgefield developer, said Thurmond was "doing reasonably well today," and while alert, has shown some general physical weakening recently.

"There was a case when for a week he didn't want to get out of bed, but he was much better Wednesday, sat up a good while and was sitting up this morning," Rainsford said.

U.S. Attorney Strom Thurmond Jr., Thurmond's son and the family spokesman, declined to comment.

Thurmond's estranged wife, Nancy, has been saying at a local inn to provide care for him.

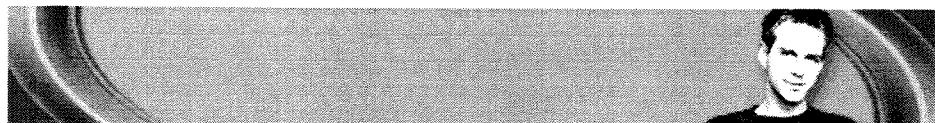
Thurmond retired from the Senate in January after 48 years and returned to his hometown of Edgefield to live in a two-room suite in the local hospital.

He had spent the last year of his Senate term at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington so doctors could monitor his increasingly frail health.

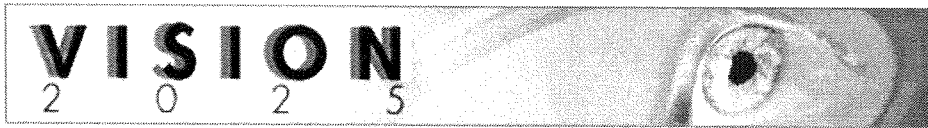
State Sen. John Courson, R-Columbia, Thurmond's former campaign treasurer, said he saw him 10 days ago, calling it "a good visit."

"He has good days and bad days," Courson said. He deferred comment to Thurmond Jr. when asked to define a "bad day."

— Dan Hoover covers politics and can be reached at 298-4883.



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DJJ, Clemson unite to help juveniles in trouble

Posted Thursday, May 22, 2003 - 4:21 pm

By Anna Simon
CLEMSON BUREAU
asimon@greenvillenews.com

Clemson University and the state Department of Juvenile Justice have teamed up to help rehabilitate incarcerated juveniles and keep other troubled youths out of jail.

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The two sealed an agreement Thursday to work together on projects such as day treatment centers, help for families of troubled youth and development of the state juvenile prison's 600-acre campus.

"If we can pull this off, I think it will be a model for the nation," said Bill Byars, director of DJJ. "We're going to save kids."

About 1,400 youth are in DJJ custody, and another 27,000 across the state are in the juvenile justice system but not incarcerated, said Byars and Stephen Lance, director of marketing for Clemson's Youth Leadership Institute.

"This is the last chance to turn them around," said Byars, a former Family Court judge. "Historically we have not been very successful in the number of kids we were able to turn around."

The only current funding is a \$5,000 grant from The Kellogg Foundation, and DJJ and Clemson have suffered recent state budget cuts.

But if nothing is done, "We'll just be locking kids up, and when we turn them out, they'll be worse than when they came in," Byars said.

Clemson will provide expertise that DJJ can't afford to hire, Byars said, and the state juvenile facility will be a learning laboratory for Clemson students and researchers.

"Clemson has a depth of knowledge, and I've got all these kids that are locked up and I've got them sitting on 600 acres in old buildings and they need to be occupied. They need to be learning new things," Byars said.

He wants to get non-violent juveniles "out from behind razor wire" and into wilderness camps that "turn around about two thirds of the kids," Byars said.

Clemson can develop a variety of programs to keep juveniles from being incarcerated or committing further crimes, Lance said.

"Some of these kids have family problems that need to be resolved. We're also talking

about doing day treatment to give some of these young people a place to go after school when most of the crimes are committed," Lance said.

Three items on the table include:

* The Palmetto Plan : A program which will make use of the natural resources in DJJ's long-term incarceration facilities to create an environment similar to that of its community wilderness camps.

* Respite Care for Families: A residential weekend program in an informal camp atmosphere for families of at-risk youths to let parents and guardians address issues impacting their families in an environment that encourages group discussion.

* Day Treatment Centers: These centers will be used for previously convicted juveniles who are likely to re-offend and as a diversion program for new offenders.



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License plan could be deadly

Posted Wednesday, May 21, 2003 - 9:21 pm

South Carolina has some of the deadliest roads in the nation.

A driver's license proposal could make our roads even more unsafe.

Here's how: State lawmakers plan to let motorists renew driver's licenses once every 10 years rather than once every five.

That will come as a relief to many South Carolinians who hate battling the often never-ending lines at the Division of Motor Vehicles.

But it's dangerous public policy.

Under the bill, motorists would have to take an eye test only once every 10 years rather than once every five years. Those renewing a license by Internet would only have to take an eye test every 20 years — five times the length recommended by traffic safety groups.

The new license policy could very well mean that South Carolina will have even fewer competent drivers on our roads. South Carolina already ranks No. 3 in the nation in fatalities per mile driven.

The new license would give South Carolina the second longest renewal period in the nation — although drivers 65 and older would still have to renew licenses every five years. Only Arizona would have a more lax driver's license policy than South Carolina.

"We think it's a bad idea," said Tom Crosby, vice president with AAA Carolinas, adding that the state's driver's license policy already is far too lenient. The group supports not only a regular vision test but also a regular exam to test a driver's knowledge of basic traffic law.

Before state lawmakers embrace a 10-year license, they should recall the state's purpose in requiring a driver's license in the first place:

"A driver's license demonstrates that a person has the knowledge and ability to handle a vehicle on South Carolina roads," according to Sid Gaulden, DMV spokesman.

The vision test is a "key part" of proving that a driver has the ability to handle a vehicle, according to the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators.

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Paul Hyde

- License plan could be deadly (05/21/03)
- Democrats still face long odds (05/07/03)
- Should state superintendent be appointed? (04/24/03)
- Lawmakers should pony up for buses (04/10/03)
- Lawmakers can save lives or not (03/26/03)

The AAMVA — the mother of all DMVs — recommends that all drivers have a vision screening test at least once every four years. Not 10 years, but every four.

That makes sense. Eyesight can change a great deal in four years. If a guy can't pass an eye test, we probably don't want him on the road until he gets glasses — or *better* glasses.

Personally, I never knew I needed glasses until a kindly DMV clerk told me some years ago to get glasses or get off the road. Thank you, DMV clerk.

Most states follow the AAMVA recommendations, renewing a driver's licenses every four or five years. Although some drivers avoid a regular vision test by renewing by mail or the Internet, most states require a vision test at the time of renewal.

South Carolina clearly would be going in the opposite direction, relaxing standards and being, yet again, a model of bad and dangerous behavior.

The reason the state is speeding toward a 10-year license is clear: The DMV, with its long lines, is one of the most glaring examples of a government program that doesn't work. And Gov. Sanford and lawmakers are desperate to achieve something this year, having notably failed thus far in so many other areas, including public education.

By lengthening the driver's license from five years to 10, lawmakers can drastically reduce the number of people needing driver's licenses at the DMV.

Long lines gone. Problem solved.

But what about public safety?

We all hate the long lines at the DMV. But we don't need a quick fix like the 10-year license that could result in more deaths on South Carolina roads.

Lawmakers need to slam the emergency brakes on the 10-year license plan.

Write to Paul Hyde, editorial page associate editor, at phyde@greenvillenews.com.



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Story last updated at 8:06 a.m. Friday, May 23, 2003

Howard, Altman feud boils

Bill making Charleston school board elections partisan at center of new flap

BY BRIAN HICKS

Of The Post and Courier Staff

COLUMBIA--Round 2 of the Leon Howard vs. John Graham Altman III feud in the state House nearly derailed legislation Thursday to introduce partisan politics to the Charleston County School Board.

Howard, D-Columbia, who two weeks ago called Altman a "racist bastard" on the House floor after Howard's bill requiring wrappers on plastic straws was defeated, broke the Statehouse's "gentleman's agreement" by inserting himself into the Charleston delegation vote, giving opponents of the partisan school board bill the margin to defeat the measure.

In Act 2 of the House's theatrical display, Charleston lawmakers cried foul, chaos ensued and Howard ultimately stepped aside and allowed the bill to pass on a second vote, after opponents of the bill asked that they be given the chance to be defeated with honor.

"I'm not even the sponsor of the bill," said a perplexed Altman, R-Charleston.

Thursday's drama began as a simple vote on local legislation two years in the making. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Arthur Ravenel, R-Mount Pleasant, calls for the nine members of the county school board to identify their political parties and run in primary races. The bill passed last year but was vetoed by then-Gov. Jim Hodges. The legislation was re-introduced and passed by the Senate earlier this session.

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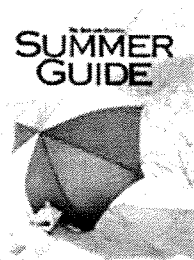
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The Charleston House delegation was expected to pass the measure largely along party lines, with Republicans for it, Democrats against it. Though there is no law preventing it, members of the General Assembly generally do not vote on legislation directed at a single county unless they represent the area.

As the House's electronic scoreboard lit up, it appeared the vote was 7-6 in favor, with Republican Rep. Ben Hagood joining Democrats in opposing the measure. But when the vote was tallied, the final count was 7-7, with Howard casting a last-second vote that seemingly doomed the effort. A measure fails if the vote is a tie.

Rep. Jim Merrill, R-Daniel Island, asked Speaker David Wilkins to rule on whether Howard could vote. Wilkins reminded him that the unwritten rule that leaves local bills to local lawmakers had no force of law behind it.

The bill appeared dead, until Hagood stepped in. The East Cooper Republican asked for another vote, a courtesy extended only to members who voted with the prevailing side. Since Hagood had voted against the bill, he qualified.

Reps. David Mack and Seth Whipper, both North Charleston Democrats, asked Howard to step aside and not stir up delegation trouble. He agreed.

The bill then passed, 7-6.

Howard, a former Richland County school board member, said later that he was compelled to break the gentleman's agreement because the bill was "not in the best interest of education.

"Being noble gentlemen, Reps. Whipper and Mack asked me not to vote against it," Howard said. "They wanted to take the high road. I don't think John Graham Altman would take the high road in that position. He would take the road that's lower than a snake's belly."

Some Charleston lawmakers said Howard was simply exacting payback for Altman's role in defeating a bill earlier this month that would have banned uncovered drinking straws in restaurants. After that measure failed, Howard rushed Altman on the House floor, called him a "racist bastard" and asked him to step outside, as if challenging him to a fight.

The Charleston bill to require school board candidates to run by political affiliation has raised the eyebrows of several lawmakers, with some stepping into the local debate to question the issue. Merrill argued that party backing in a primary gives candidates more exposure and voters a better idea of their choices.

"The liberals don't want it because they know their people won't win anymore," Merrill said.

Mack, an opponent of the move, said Republican lawmakers weren't listening to the people who showed up at Sen. John



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Kuhn's hearings on public education earlier this year.

"A majority of Charleston County voters said they didn't want this, black, white, Democrats, Republicans," Mack said. "That's the thing that is so disappointing."

Hagood, the lone dissenting Republican, said he opposed the measure because he preferred the methods of school reform outlined in his pending legislation. One of those bills would create a non-partisan primary, in which a field of candidates without party affiliation would be whittled down to two people who compete in a general election.

"I asked for the reconsideration even though I was pleased with the outcome because I think it's not only important to get the right results, I believe you need to get there the right way," said Hagood, R-Sullivan's Island.

With the vote Thursday, the bill needs only a final, third reading vote from the House on Tuesday to move to the governor's desk. Often, local bills approved on second reading are given "unanimous consent" for third-reading approval, which in this case would have occurred automatically today with the House in perfunctory session.

Altman said he was afraid to ask for that motion.

"I was afraid the speaker would laugh at me," Altman said.

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Story last updated at 7:17 a.m. Friday, May 23, 2003

Democrats want to see Sanders rerun for Senate

BY SCHUYLER KROPP

Of The Post and Courier Staff

In terms of geography and parity, it makes sense for Alex Sanders to make another run for the Senate, some fellow Democrats say.

With incumbent Sen. Fritz Hollings looking ready to retire, many party members see Sanders, a former College of Charleston president, as a logical choice to try to succeed Hollings, despite losing in his first Senate bid last year.

The advantage, they say, is that he would be a Democrat from Charleston, as is Hollings, and he would be seen as providing parity against Upstate Republican U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, something that would appeal to independents.

Sanders also comes from the coast, a region that Democrats consider vital to corral if their party is to remain competitive.

On Thursday, Sanders declined to discuss what he might do. In media reports earlier in the week, he said he was not interested in another Senate race, although his wife has encouraged him to consider it.

College of Charleston history professor Jack Bass said it would not be unheard of for Sanders to run again for the statewide office, this time successfully. Both Hollings and former Sen. Strom Thurmond were defeated in their first Senate bids.

Outside of Graham, "the fact is, in the last half-century, any new U.S. senator from South Carolina was someone who was defeated on their first attempt," said Bass, who taught a history class with Sanders last semester at the college.

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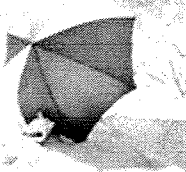
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SUMMER GUIDE



Sanders drew 44 percent of the vote in last year's election, compared with Graham's 54 percent. The rest went to third-party candidates.

Although Hollings has not ruled out seeking another term in 2004, he has given state Democratic Party Chairman Joe Erwin the OK to scout for other candidates. Many see Hollings' delay in announcing as part of a two-pronged strategy. One, he doesn't want to be seen as a lame duck in the Senate, and two, he wants to see what viable Democratic candidates might come forward.

Either way, time is running out. Fund raising will be a major concern for whoever the Democrat is, and the race is expected to cost up to \$8 million. As many as five Republicans are considering or have announced bids, including four from the coast: former Attorney General Charlie Condon, former U.S. Rep. Tommy Hartnett, developer Thomas Ravenel, all from the Charleston area, and Myrtle Beach Mayor Mark McBride. Fourth District U.S. Rep. Jim DeMint of Greenville also is in the race.

Hartnett said Thursday if he does run, he wants it to be a rematch against Hollings, whom he unsuccessfully challenged a decade ago.

Republicans "want a good clean shot at" Hollings, added state GOP Chairman Katon Dawson.

Erwin said Thursday that the party has until late summer to settle on its candidate, whether it be Hollings or someone else. He has a list of possible candidates, but nothing is definite.

"It's still (Hollings') call to make, and nobody else's," Erwin said, adding that in the search for potential successors, "geography is certainly party of the equation. There is no doubt about that." Erwin hoped to meet with Hollings in the next two weeks to discuss his future.

Several other ranking local Democrats already have rejected the idea of running for the Senate. U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., the state's black congressman from the 6th District, said he won't run. He suggested Sanders, Education Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum and 5th District U.S. Rep. John Spratt of York as possible successors to Hollings.

Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr., who is up for re-election, reiterated Thursday that he has no interest in the Senate seat.

Schuyler Kropf covers state and local politics. Contact him at 937-5551.



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